



Brides of Death



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«The Brides of Death» is the name invented by the Yemeni Human Rights organizations for the girls who were married off in young age and thanks to the efforts of some human rights activists, the issue of marriage of minor girls was included among the main issues into the working program of the National Dialogue Conference.

Reem.. Marriage with the Taste of Suicide

"I informed my family that I am not happy with my husband, and that I want to get divorced, but all of them ignored my request and they do not care about my feelings", said Reem, a girl who barely reached twelve. She substituted items "copy-books, my pens, my games" with items: "my husband, divorce, court of law, escape, suicide." "I tried to escape many times, but could not, and two times I thought of killing myself. I tried to commit suicide by throwing myself from the roof of a building, and for sure will kill myself if I return to my husband or my father", added Reem when she was talking about the conflict going on between her parents of which she became one of the victims. "My father was calling my mother and saying Reem would get married, and when he heard her crying for me, he was asking if she was crying, and saying that he liked to hear her crying". Her father's wish to take revenge of her mother was the main reason why he got Reem married. Reem's parents were separated for some time and her father wanted to settle the accounts with her mother and Reem topped the list of playoffs. On the 7th of July last year, Reem went to the court asking to get divorced from her cousin (son of her uncle), thirty-one years

old, which she married under big pressure from her father, but the court rejected her request, and "until now the court does not agree to grant me divorce", they told her to come back when she reaches fifteen years of age and can chose if she would like to stay married or get divorced.

A girl "Reem" has borne the name of her husband for 11 days only. Her father opened the subject of his wish to get her married to his nephew at 11 o'clock in the morning and at 3 o'clock afternoon of the same day her wedding took place and everything was arranged for it without her knowledge.

And after short marriage life full of troubles, Reem's husband took her back to her father's house to stay there for some time to calm down her nerves, and her father started to pressurize her to go back to her husband's house, but she managed to pass some important information to her mother through neighbours. Her mother was able to contact police station "Hemiyari" in the Capital City which summoned the father and started to investigate him, while the mother came with her daughter to the Refuge House run by the Yemeni Women Union.

Early Marriage

Marriage of Underage Girls



Child Marriage in Yemen

Child marriage is a widespread phenomenon in Yemen equally in rural and urban areas. Yemen occupies 14th place between the countries where early marriage is prevalent, and girls are getting married before getting twelve or thirteen years old, especially in Hadhramaut and Al-Hodeidah where girls are getting married at the age not exceeding eight years especially if they are getting married to relatives, as was presented in the Human Rights Watch report.

Many campaigns against early marriage were conducted in Yemen, one of which succeeded in imposing the draft Personal Statute law on the parliament which was never promulgated because

of heavy opposition to it. Also the revolution led to changing the priorities, putting necessity for reconstruction on the top of the list and making discourse about early marriage “the luxury” mocked by Yemenis according to some of the activists who threw the responsibility on the government.

The study undertaken by the Ministry of Human Rights revealed that girls in rural areas get married early as opposed to the spread of spinsterhood in the cities, and that the solution of the problem is not in the strict law determining marriage age but it should be reinforced by education and fighting poverty and conducting awareness

Early marriage is marriage before reaching eighteen years of age for girls because a girl is not fully mature before that age and she does not have capacity to give her consent, therefore it is important to have implicated verbal definition of early marriage and forced marriage. Also, because of the age of minor girls, we can use the expression “early marriage” interchangeably with “child marriage”.

Since the husband is selected for an underage girl without her consent, this means in other words that her fate is decided for her without her knowledge, which represents gender-based violence against girls manifesting one of the most dangerous violations of human rights in accordance with the International Convention on Child Rights. In Yemen, conservative social norms and poverty contribute to compelling families to marry off their daughters earlier to alleviate financial burden on the family and reduce expenses on education. Also, many fathers have a belief if they marry off their girls early it would protect their honour.

Basmala: my father got me married and I was thirteen years old in fear of my deviation and at the same time he was afraid of spinsterhood, while the marriage of my sister and my uncle's daughters was delayed a lot. My husband was twenty-one years old, and I had not reached puberty yet.

campaigns for the citizens to overcome prevailing convictions pushing people to go around the law for marrying off underage girls.

In accordance with random national survey conducted by the Government of Yemen in cooperation with UNICEF in 2006, 14% of girls in Yemen are getting married before reaching 15 years of age and 52% of girls are getting married before completing 18 years of age.

Another study conducted by the University of Sana'a indicated that in some governorates girls are getting married at the age of 8.

Also, 95% of Yemeni women do not have ID cards which facilitates marriage of underage girls which do not appear in front of the judge (writing the marriage contract) who is satisfied by what girl's guardian and the witnesses say about bride's eligibility for marriage without mentioning her age for issuing official marriage contract.

At the same time, the studies indicate that there is strong relation between early marriage and raise in violence against girls in addition to the increase in divorce rates between the couples married early.

Survey conducted in 2002 by the government about domestic violence in Yemen, indicated that 17.3% of the sample were exposed to sexual violence, and 54% were exposed to physical assault, and 50% were exposed to verbal threats. Also Yemen is one of the countries with highest mortality rate among women during pregnancy and childbirth reaching 210 deaths per each 100,000 of childbirths. Maternal mortality rate in Yemen constitutes 39% of the total deaths of women of reproductive age, and the child marriage is considered as the main reason for this. Government statistics indicates that 47.2% of maternal mortality cases fall on girls and women married before reaching age of 20.



Impacts Resulting from Prevalence of Early Marriage

Impacts of marriage during the age of childhood can be destructive and have long consequences, and the most important of them are as follows:

- Majority of girls who get married early drop out from school.

In accordance with the report by Human Rights Watch, one of the teachers in Al-Hodeidah governorate indicated that majoring of girls drop out from school after grade four or five (at the age of nine or ten) when girls become adolescent and reach puberty, they return to the house to bring water and cook or get married if there is an opportunity.

- Unplanned reproduction and bringing big number of children because of the lack of maturity of girls who get married early making them more exposed to recurrent and complicated pregnancies.
- Increase is spread of violence against small girls from their husbands or husband's family because young girls often do not understand their responsibilities as a wife and a mother, and young parents also lack the capacity to bring up their children in sound manner.
- Dangerous health problems during pregnancy and delivery leading to death in most cases and giving birth to low-weight newborns which sometimes are affected by

health disorders.

- Repeated miscarriages in girls who get pregnant at early age.

Amal, from Al-Haima reached 25 years of age. She got married when she was fifteen and got her only daughter when she was seventeen.

Amal told Human Right Watch that she got pregnant six times and got miscarriage three times and got medical abortion two times clarifying that first time the fetus died inside and second time the fetus was removed from her uterus but it was also dead.

- Raise in divorce rates because young wives cannot bear the burdens of married life.

A girl from Aden told a story of her friend who got married early: I was in the seventh grade when we were surprised by the news that our friend is getting married. She was happy that at last she would get rid of poverty and of her father's harsh treatment. However, after marriage she stopped going to school because of pregnancy and she was pregnant with twins, and after some time we knew that she got divorces because of the problems between her and her husband and her mother-in-law. Now she is divorced in her father's house who was trying to get rid of providing for her by getting her married early and ended up by providing for three children instead of one.

FGM

Permanent Wound

I was born in India, with my parents coming originally from Hadhramaut from a big and very conservative family. Female circumcision is not practiced in India, therefore I and my sisters were not circumcised. After some time we returned to Hadhramaut and I also did not circumcise my daughters, and everybody advised me to circumcise them because the tradition says that uncircumcised girls will not get married because they will be seen as not pure and people will look down at them. I did not listen to these talks and adhered to my decision not to circumcise them because of the stories I have heard. Thus, a six-month

old daughter of our neighbor died of tetanus two weeks after circumcision, and another girl five months old was suffering from stricture in urethral opening because of the circumcision in a wrong way, and she had plastic surgery which caused a fortune.

The respondent added: "Circumcision is something dangerous which deprives woman from her marital rights and I hope to see all partners to collaborate for prohibiting this harmful phenomenon

Story from the case study conducted by the Yemeni Women Union about female circumcision "Between the View of Religion and Cultural Heritage" 2007



Definition of FGM

Term Female Genital Mutilation or female circumcision defines all interventions for partial or complete removal or cutting of external female reproductive organs or any other inflicted injury to female reproductive system for cultural or any other non-medical reasons.

Harmful Effects of FGM:

FGM has big number of harmful physical and psychological impacts on circumcised woman which also affect persons close to her mostly her husband and children (if she has children), and physical impacts on affecting women includes the following:

- Sexual disability an in brief it is lack of woman's capacity to reach and give her husband sexual satisfaction.

"S" is sure that FGM is the main reason for her unresponsiveness in sexual relations with her husband and therefore she decided not to do circumcision for her last daughter.

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- Decrease in fertility which reaches barrenness sometimes.

- Sharp pain during intercourse.
- Complications leading to the probability of maternal and newborn death during childbirth.
- Severe pain during menstruation.
- Repeated inflammation of urethra and urinary incontinence.
- Dermal cysts, suppuration and scarring.
- Increased possibility of fistula.
- In some cases appearance of physical disorders resulting from disruption of functions of the brain.

In addition to the above, FGM gets women exposed to a number of psychological problems such as:

- Depression and anxiety.
- Short temper and irritability.

One woman from Abyan, 33 years old, said that she was always suffering from severe pain and during examination big cyst was found and it was a fatty cyst. The test confirmed that it was the consequence of her being exposed to FGM when she was small.

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FGM in Yemen

The Hidden and the Visible

Despite the dangerous health and psychological consequences of FGM, there are still some families in Yemeni governorates which until now expose their daughters to the FGM risks at present and in the future and the tradition of FGM triggers great controversy in Yemeni society. There are people demanding its prohibition due to its negative consequences and because it does not constitute imperative religious obligation and leads to serious health hazards, and is a painful experience against the dignity of a woman. At the same time, the supporters see FGM as evidence of purity and cleanliness and refer it to the religious belief and adherence to customs and traditions.

Coastal governorates in Yemen are the areas where phenomenon of FGM is spread mostly while its rates is low in other governorates and most likely it is a social custom imported from the neighbouring countries in the African Horn."



Indicators of the Demographic Survey show that 20% of women in the five coastal governorates have undergone circumcision in traditional way despite tight medical provisions prohibiting this.

The report mentions that the Republic of Yemen is among the countries which signed all international treaties concerned with Human Rights and that the Ministry of Public Health and Population issued a decree in 2001 banning all private and public hospitals and health centers from performing the operation of FGM and despite the decree of the Minister of Public Health of Yemen prohibiting all staff providing medical services in public and private facilities from performing this operation under the penalty of legal accountability, this phenomenon still persists.

The phenomenon of FGM is not restricted to the coastal governorates as was believed, but this custom is also practiced in some inland governorates such as Saada, Lahj, Dhamar, and Taiz in line with prevailing

customs and traditions.

The Yemeni Women Union has implemented a project for combating FGM in 2007 aiming at raising Yemeni women health level and spreading awareness among general public about the hazards of FGM for girls and women and knowledge about the types of FGM. The project targeted four coastal governorates: Aden, Al-Hodeidah, Hadhramaut and Al-Mahra where this custom is the most widespread and these are the governorates where the influence of the African migrants from Somalia, Sudan and Ethiopia, the countries where all types of FGM is widely practiced, is prevalent.

The tragic stories of some girls about the FGM experience indicate that painful memories haunt them after it for many years and affect the harmony of their private life with their husbands.

New study about FGM practice in Yemen revealed that 33% of women who had undergone FGM lost sexual desire.

A.S. said “I believe that FGM is “haram” (forbidden) because it violates women rights. I really hate my husband and he knows it and says that he would marry an uncircumcised woman to respond to his needs”.

Story from the case study conducted by the Yemeni Women Union about female circumcision “Between the View of Religion and Cultural Heritage” 2007.

Sources:

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- Book “Female Circumcision: Between the View of Religion and Cultural Heritage”.
- *Report of the Human Rights Watch about Child Marriage in Yemen.*